

# Who Is The Prophesied Elijah?

Long ago, God declared, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Just who is this “Elijah” whose coming would precede the day of the Lord? Has he come already? Or should we look for him to appear in the future?

## *Who Is the Prophesied ‘Elijah’?*

**Long ago, God declared, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Just *who* is this “Elijah” whose coming would precede the day of the Lord? Has he come already? Or should we look for him to appear in the future?**

The New Testament reveals that the Old Testament prophecy about God’s “messenger” (Malachi 3:1), called “Elijah the prophet” in Malachi 4:5, was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist.

Jesus was speaking of John when He said, “he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:14); and, “Elijah has come already” (17:10; cf. Mark 9:13).

When John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21,25), he must have been denying that he was Elijah the Tishbite, who had mightily opposed the Baal worshipers on Mount Carmel during the reign of king Ahab (1 Kings 19), and was taken into the sky by a whirlwind after passing his mantle to Elisha, his successor (2 Kings 2).

This must have been John’s meaning, for not only did Jesus say that the Baptist was the prophesied Elijah, but Zacharias (John’s father) knew that his son would fulfill the prophecy concerning the coming Elijah (Luke 1:13-17, 76-79). Surely John himself knew that he was the one prophesied to prepare the way for Christ. In fact, John 1:23 indicates that John was aware of his prophesied role.

Yet, as clear as the New Testament is in identifying John as the prophesied Elijah, some claim that Malachi’s prophecy about Elijah pertains primarily to someone other than John. They claim that John did not truly fulfill the requirements of the Elijah-office, that he did not restore anything (as Elijah is supposed to do), and that John was but a type—a mere forerunner, at best—of an end-time Elijah who would do a much greater work than John did.

But does the Bible explicitly teach that the “Elijah” prophecy would find its primary fulfillment in the time of the end, just before the Second Coming of Christ? Does the

New Testament indicate that an “Elijah” other than John would come on the scene and “restore all things” before Christ returns?

And was John the Baptist a (comparatively weak) forerunner or type of a future Elijah whose great ministry would make John’s efforts seem rather pitiful?

Let’s now turn our attention to the Scriptures, and ‘allow divine revelation to help us separate what can be certainly *known* from speculation and guess work. Our beliefs and practices must be based on what can be *known*, not on fanciful theories and highly speculative ideas.

### God’s Messenger

Through the prophet Malachi, God says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming” (Malachi 3:1).

The one called “My messenger” is clearly distinct from the one called the “Messenger of the covenant.” “My messenger” is the forerunner of—“prepares the way before”—the “Messenger of the covenant,” who is also called “the Lord, whom you seek,” and who “will come suddenly to His temple.”

God says, “My messenger... will prepare the way before *Me*.” He—GOD!—is “the Lord” who comes to “*His* temple.” He is the “Messenger of the covenant” whose coming is preceded by the one called “My messenger.”

Recall John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God”—the Word was with God the Father—“and the Word *was* God.” The God of Scripture is one in essence, but is more than one divine Person. As the Father is God, so is the Son. Verse 14 says, “And the Word”—was with God and was God—“*became flesh* and dwelt among us.”

Clearly, the divine “Lord” and “Messenger of the covenant” of Malachi 3:1 can be none other than the Lord *Jesus Christ!* His forerunner is the one here called “My messenger” who is sent to “prepare the way” for Him.

But *who* is the one called “My messenger”? Does the Bible reveal his identity?

Remember, Jesus Christ is called the “Word of God” (Revelation 19:13; cf. John 1:1). The Bible—the Old Testament along with the New—is also the “Word of God.” As Jesus is the personal Word of God, the Bible is the written Word of God. The two speak the same thing! They never contradict! The *personal* Word, Christ, has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), and therefore has authority to

interpret—to REVEAL the true meaning of—the *written* Word of God. When He speaks—when He declares the meaning of a passage of Scripture—we ought to stop and *listen!*

Now, just what does Jesus Christ—the *personal* Word of God—have to say about the meaning of Malachi 3:1?

Let's listen carefully to His interpretation:

Speaking of John the Baptist, Jesus says, “But what did you [the multitudes] go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. [Notice this carefully!] This is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before your face, who will prepare Your way before You’” (Luke 7:24-27).

There it is! The identity of the one called “My messenger” (Malachi 3:1) is *John the Baptist!* Jesus said so! Therefore, any interpretation that has someone *other than* John the Baptist fulfilling the “messenger” role is to be rejected. Any interpretation that has John the Baptist as merely a type, shadow, or forerunner of some future messenger whose ministry is the primary fulfillment of this prophecy should be regarded as purely hypothetical, and should *never* find its way into the basic doctrinal foundation of one's faith.

Remember, our faith should be anchored to what we KNOW, not to mere speculation. We KNOW for sure that the messenger who prepares the way for Christ is John the Baptist. To deny this fact is to deny the very words of Christ! This we KNOW!

Anything beyond what we KNOW for sure is speculation, or just plain *guess* work! *Never* should we anchor our faith to guess work! *Never* should such an unproved (and unprovable) theory be categorized as *doctrine* or *dogma!* *Never* should speculation become a part of the foundation on which our faith is built!

Jesus tells us in plain language that the one called “My messenger” (Malachi 3:1) is John the Baptist. Let's simply believe it, and let's refrain from adding anything to *His* interpretation.

### **The Prophesied ‘Elijah’**

Let's now turn our attention to the prophecy that specifically states that Elijah will come before the day of the Lord arrives.

Through the prophet Malachi, God says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5,6).

The “Elijah” spoken of here is not the original Elijah (whose story is told in 1 Kings 17-19 and 2 Kings 1-2), but is one who comes in the spirit and power of the original Elijah.

Here, as in many other Messianic prophecies, the times associated with the First Coming of Christ and the future Second Coming are mingled. The reason for this is that, from God’s point of view, the “last days” began with the First Coming of Christ and will culminate in the Second Coming. Peter tells us that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). This simply means that God does not experience the passage of time the way we do. To Him, there is little difference between a thousand years and a day. He sees the Incarnation and the Second Coming as two aspects of one act of redemption.

Further, it should be noted that the phrase “day of the Lord” refers to any day God steps into our world and performs His wondrous works. Each “day of the Lord” takes us a step closer to the final day of the Lord, when Christ steps in as King of kings and Lord of lords to judge the world in righteousness. From God’s point of view, the preparatory work of Elijah just precedes the arrival of the final day of the Lord. However, to humans, who perceive a vast difference between a thousand years and a day, Elijah’s coming and the final day of the Lord may be separated by a great span of time.

The “earth” (Malachi 4:6) is most likely the land of promise, since the word translated “earth” can be rendered “land,” and since the larger context concerns the problems the Jews experienced after returning from the Babylonian captivity. The text speaks of the temple (3:1; cf. 3:8-11), the sons of Levi (3:3), the offering of Judah and Jerusalem (3:4), the sons of Jacob (3:6), and the Law of Moses (4:4), showing plainly that Malachi’s message pertains primarily (though not exclusively) to the Jews of ancient times.

The “Elijah” spoken of here is the one called “My messenger” in Malachi 3:1. His mission is to announce the coming of the Messiah and to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”

Luke helps us better understand the meaning of Elijah’s role of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and vice versa. Notice the wording of the Evangelist’s reference to Malachi’s prophecy:

“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

Notice the phrase “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” This sheds some light on the meaning of Elijah’s job of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and vice

versa. It simply means that, through Elijah's message, the rebellious "children" will remember the faith and obedience of their fathers and turn to emulate them. It means that the disobedient will turn to the wisdom of the righteous by heeding God's commandments. They will join the Psalmist in saying, "You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies" (Psalm 119:98). Simply stated, *Elijah's task is to preach a message of REPENTANCE as he announces the coming of the Messiah and prepares a people for His appearance.*

The unique "Elijah" witness preceded Christ's ministry, but the call to conversion through repentance and faith has continued from the first Pentecost following Christ's resurrection until the present, and will continue until the close of the present age. It seems highly improbable that a second Elijah would be needed to prepare a people for the coming of Christ, for the Church herself is a people prepared for the Lord, and she continues to proclaim the good news of Christ and His Kingdom to the world.

Now, let's look at some claims that have been made about the prophesied Elijah, and then turn our attention to the New Testament and see what it says about the identity of the prophet.

### **Fantastic Claims**

Some claim that John the Baptist was a mere forerunner, or type, of the one who will truly fulfill the prophecies about a coming Elijah.

One writer (who later changed his opinion), had this to say back in 1986:

"Jesus said, Elias [Elijah] truly shall come, and restore all things (Matt. 17:11). Jesus was referring to something that was to happen in the future. John the Baptist had already come, and Jesus didn't begin His ministry until John had been put in prison. John didn't restore anything. Jesus was referring to ANOTHER MAN, not John.

"Shortly before the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, SOMEONE would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, in the spirit and power of John the Baptist, and would restore all things to the Church."

Another writer expressed similar thoughts: "John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, but he never turned the hearts of the fathers to the children. Those people following John did not have God's Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit this would have been spiritually impossible. It says 'he' (end-time John) would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and prepare the way for Christ's Second Coming"

Commenting on Luke 1:17, the same writer said, "Only *one man* of God is in the spotlight to prepare the Church for Christ's Second Coming." The "one man" was not John the Baptist, the writer claims, but was Herbert W. Armstrong.

Herbert W. Armstrong himself, commenting on Matthew 17:11, wrote, “This could not possibly refer to John the Baptist. John the Baptist restored nothing, but called on people to repent in preparation for the First Coming of Jesus as a physical human.”

If we accept the claims above, then we believe that John the Baptist did not restore anything, that he did not turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and that he was, at best, only a preliminary “Elijah” whose accomplishments are hardly comparable to the accomplishments of the one (the end-time Elijah) these prophecies are really about.

Please continue reading, and see undeniable PROOF that the above claims are absolutely *preposterous!* They completely ignore a good number of plain scriptural statements about the ministry of John the Baptist, while focusing on a narrow (and doubtful) interpretation of a couple of passages.

### **The POWERFUL Ministry of John the Baptist**

First, let’s notice just how *powerful* John’s ministry was as he prepared the way for Jesus’s ministry.

Matthew tells us that in the days before Jesus began His ministry, “John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’”

As we have seen, Malachi’s “Elijah” was to prepare the way before the Messiah by calling upon the people to turn to God in heart-rending *repentance*. Here, we find John the Baptist doing just that!

But did he succeed in his mission? Did he manage to reach the hearts of a significant number of people, causing them to repent of their sins? Did he truly accomplish the task of “turning the hearts of the fathers to the children...”?

Or was his ministry largely unsuccessful?

The above quotations from modern writers leave the impression that John’s ministry had little effect, that the Baptist could not have possibly fulfilled the monumental task prophesied for the coming Elijah.

But let’s see what the *Bible* says!

Matthew continues by pointing out that John the Baptist is the one spoken of by Isaiah in his prophecy about the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” (3:3; cf. Isaiah 40:3). He then tells us that the Baptist “was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey” (3:4)—just what one would expect of a person resembling the original Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and accustomed to wilderness living.

Now, notice carefully the next two verses. They are critical to the question of whether John's ministry was effective, and whether he truly fulfilled the Elijah-mission of preparing a people for the Messiah. Notice:

"Then Jerusalem, ALL Judea, and ALL the region around the Jordan went out to him [John] and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins" (verses 5,6).

Read the passage again, carefully. It does not say, "Then a *few* people from the area came out to him." No, it plainly says that "*all* Judea, and *all* the region around the Jordan went out to him." The response to John's preaching was so strong that even the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to investigate (3:7). Make no mistake, this was *not* a tiny, ineffective "work that served only as a shadowy type of the *real* work of Elijah.

The other Evangelists also attest to the powerful witness provided by John's ministry. Mark writes, "Then *all the land of Judea*, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). Luke writes, "And he went into *all the region around the Jordan*, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3).

*John drew the attention of a great multitude!* He announced the coming of the Messiah, and identified Him when He appeared (Matthew 3:11-17; Mark 1:7-11; Luke 3:16,17; John 1:26-36). And, as we have seen, he preached a *powerful* message of repentance. John truly fulfilled the requirements and responsibilities of the prophesied Elijah.

Now, recall that one of the writers cited above said that Luke 1:17 has "only *one man* in the spotlight," and that the "one man" is *not* John the Baptist. John, the writer claims, "never turned the hearts of the fathers to the children."

Is this true? Let us again go to the Scriptures, and put the writer's claim to the test. But first, it should be noted that the same writer calls upon his readers to put him and all other leaders to the test. He writes, "John [in 1 John 4:1] pleaded with God's 'beloved' people to 'try the spirits,' Why? Because there are 'many' false prophets and false leaders. Often these deceivers were in God's Church. We must always test our leaders with God's word. That certainly includes me. You MUST PROVE what I say in this book!"

Very well! Let's now test the writer's claim by comparing his statements with the revelation of God's Word.

Carefully read the following passage:

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Zacharias], standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and you wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be

filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,'* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:11-17).

Study the above passage carefully, and then answer the following

questions:

- 1) *What name was to be given to the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth?*
- 2) *Who is the "he" who will be great in the Lord's sight?*
- 3) *Who is the "He" who will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb?*
- 4) *Who is the "he" who will turn many to the Lord God?*
- 5) *Who is the "He" who will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah?*
- 6) *Who is the "He" who will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children?*
- 7) *Who is the "He" who will make ready a people for the Lord?*

If you read the passage carefully, then you know that the answer to all the above is *John!* It was he—John the Baptist—who would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, who would prepare the way for Christ through a message of repentance, who would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Yet, incredibly, some claim that John did not accomplish the task of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and that Luke 1:17 speaks of someone *other than* John the Baptist. *There is no excuse for such a deceptive handling of the Scriptures!*

How could anyone, after reading the passage above, claim that John the Baptist "never turned the hearts of the fathers to the children"? As we have seen, this expression is simply a way of describing heart-rending repentance, which necessarily *precedes* the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Yet, one writer claims that the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children is possible only when the Holy Spirit already indwells the people. What nonsense!

### **John the Baptist and Malachi's 'Elijah'!**

Jesus Christ Himself declared that John the Baptist was the prophesied "Elijah." Notice:



As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: *‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’* Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there had not arisen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 11:7-15).

These are the words of Jesus Christ, the *personal* Word of God! Let’s not lightly pass over them, but let’s take them very seriously!

First, Jesus says in the clearest of terms that John, the one the people had gone out into the wilderness to see, is the one spoken of in Malachi’s prophecy—the messenger who is to prepare the way before the Messiah.

Second, Jesus says in equally clear terms that John the Baptist “*is* Elijah who is to come”! How much clearer could it be? There is no mystery here, no “hard saying,” no complicated text that requires the analytical skills of a team of biblical scholars. The PLAIN TRUTH of the matter is that John the Baptist *IS* the prophesied Elijah!

Third, Jesus says, “And if you are willing to receive it ...,” and, “He who has ears, let him hear,” revealing His perception that some refused to accept that John was the prophesied Elijah. He most likely had the scribes and leaders in mind. Nevertheless, modern leaders who would have us believe that John “restored nothing” and could not have accomplished the mission of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children should TAKE NOTE! They are making claims that clearly contradict the plain teaching of Jesus Christ!

In Matthew 17, Jesus tells His disciples that “Elijah has come already,” and “the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (verses 12,13).

In Luke 1, Zacharias (John’s father) utters a prophecy about his son:

And you, child [the infant John], will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (verses 76-79).

Zacharias is clearly alluding to Malachi's prophecy about the messenger who will prepare the way before the coming of the Lord, and he says in unmistakable language that "you, child"—John!—would accomplish this task.

And accomplish it he did! So says your Bible!

### **A Second Elijah?**

We now come to a major "proof text" used by those who would have us believe that John the Baptist was merely a forerunner or shadowy type of a future Elijah who, unlike John, would *really* accomplish the task of "preparing the way" and "turning the hearts of the fathers to the children...."

The text in question is found within Matthew 17:10-13:

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision [of the Transfiguration] to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

Here's how the argument is made: Jesus said that Elijah "*is* coming...and *will* restore all things." But He also said that Elijah (identified as John the Baptist) "*has come already.*" These are two different Elijahs. One is John, who has "come already." The other is a future Elijah, who "will restore all things" before the Second Coming of Christ.

This interpretation appears sound on the surface, but a closer examination reveals its weakness.

The disciples knew that the scribes had taught that before the Messiah's kingdom could be established, Elijah was to come and restore all things. Yet, Jesus had just mentioned His coming death. The disciples were wondering how the Messiah could be killed after all things had been restored. A restored environment and murdered Messiah seemed incompatible.

Jesus says, in effect, "Yes, the saying of the scribes is true, 'Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.' But I tell you that the prophesied Elijah has *already* come, and they rejected him. It should not be surprising, then, that the Messiah whose way Elijah prepared would also be despised."

The reader should not read the phrase “restore all things” too literally. John the Baptist’s ministry was a work of restoration in that he reached the hearts of many with his message of repentance and announcement of the Messiah’s coming, thereby preparing a significant number of people for Christ’s appearance. In this sense, he “restored all things,” or set in order everything required of the Elijah-mission. The scribes apparently expected Elijah to bring the nation back to God and thereby unify them for the Messiah’s coming, but their understanding of how these prophesied events would play out was in error.

New Testament scholar D.A. Carson notes, “John’s mission was a success...but, on the other hand, ‘restore all things’ must not be taken absolutely. The Baptist stood in succession of the OT prophets who were persecuted and even killed. The unrecognized fact is that although the scribes’ *interpretation* is right—Elijah must precede the Messiah—their grasp of recent *history* is wrong, for Elijah has already come...; but the people in general and the scribes and leaders in particular did not recognize him and did to him ‘everything they wished’...”

The description of Elijah “restoring all things” should be understood as simply a way of speaking of the prophet’s mission of “turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” And, as we have seen, Scripture affirms that John was successful in accomplishing the Elijah-mission.

### **What About ‘Duality’?**

Some will immediately object by arguing that all prophecy is dual—that is, that the prophecies of Scripture have a preliminary as well as a final fulfillment. Some call this “double fulfillment.”

Actually, the duality principle of prophecy (or double fulfillment) does not apply to all prophecies of Scripture. For instance, the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:21 can have only *one* fulfillment, for there cannot be two different periods of history that can rightly be described as a time of trouble “such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Old Testament prophecies on the coming of the Messiah may be said to be dual in the sense that Christ comes once as the Lamb of God who gives His life for the sins of the world and a second time as the King of kings and Lord of lords who judges the world in righteousness. Yet, on the other hand, these two comings are distinct, and are not merely the type and antitype of a dual fulfillment. The Old Testament prophesied Christ’s suffering and death, and that happened only once. It will never be repeated. Christ will come again, not in two phases (as the “secret rapture” proponents claim), but only once. All prophecies about the Second Coming of Christ pertain to only *one* coming, not two. (For more on this, write immediately for your free copy of our booklet entitled *Should You Expect a ‘Secret Rapture’?*)

In Scripture, we *do* see types and antitypes, preliminary and primary fulfillments, and fulfillments through repetitions of prophetic patterns. But, unfortunately, some interpreters apply the double-fulfillment principle indiscriminately or to prophecies that have only a single fulfillment.

Now, it is *possible* that another Elijah-type figure will appear before the Second Coming of Christ, but nowhere do the Scriptures explicitly say that such a person will come. Again, we must base our faith on what we KNOW, not on speculation about what we think MIGHT or COULD, by some remote possibility, happen in the future.

In Matthew 24 Jesus says that the gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed to all nations before He returns, but says nothing about an Elijah-type figure coming to accomplish the task. In 2 Thessalonians 2, the apostle Paul speaks of a “man of sin” who will come on the scene before the Second Coming, but says nothing about an “Elijah” who will prepare the way before Christ’s return. The book of Revelation speaks of “two witnesses” who will prophesy against the “beast” and perform miracles like the ones Moses and Elijah performed (Revelation 11), but nowhere are we told of a lone individual coming to “restore all things” or “turn the hearts of the children to the fathers.”

The description of the ministry of the two witnesses is the closest thing to an Elijah-type ministry we can find in New Testament prophecy. Yet, the text speaks of *two* witnesses, not one. It could be argued that one is “Elijah” and the other is his assistant—but, again, this is speculation.

It should also be noted that the two witnesses are slain *after* three and one-half years of prophesying, and will lie dead in a street in Jerusalem for three days before the Lord raises them to life (Revelation 11:3,7,11). All this happens during the final time of trouble and immediately before the Second Coming of Christ.

Why is this important?

Because it shows that IF—and this is quite a big IF—the ministry of the two witnesses is somehow a fulfillment of Malachi’s “Elijah” prophecy, *then we should dismiss the idea that a man who died well over a decade ago was the prophesied Elijah!* We must dismiss the idea that an end-time Elijah has come and gone already—for the final tribulation period and ministry of the two witnesses has not yet begun!

Let’s be cautious about indiscriminately applying the duality principle. The New Testament quite specifically tells us who fulfilled Malachi’s “Elijah” prophecy. Let’s be extremely cautious about reading additional meanings into the prophecy.

## **The Great Commission**

As we have seen, it is important that we anchor our beliefs and practices to what we *know* to be true. If it is God's will to raise up another Elijah-ministry, then He will do so. But we do not know for certain that God will do this. We *do* know for certain that John the Baptist fulfilled Malachi's prophecy about the coming Elijah. Anything beyond this is speculation, and should be so acknowledged.

Jesus says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end [of the age] will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Will this final witness to all nations come through the ministry of an end-time Elijah? Possibly, but we do not know for sure. We *do* know that, one way or another, the job will be done. Jesus plainly says so!

But *how* the witness to all nations is accomplished is known only to God. We will have to wait and see how it all comes about.

In the meantime, God's people should not be overly concerned with prophetic speculation, but should concentrate their energies on doing the work Christ has set before His Church.

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," Jesus says. "*Go* therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Now that's a clear command! We *know* what it means, and we can anchor our faith to Christ's promise of being with His Church always, to the very close of the age.

All Scriptural quotations taken from NKJV. Author: Vance Stinson.

*The Worldwide News*, August 25, J. Tkach, as quoted in *Malachi's Message*, p. 14.

*Malachi's Message*, pp. 18,19.

*Mystery of the Ages*, pp. 285,286

*Malachi's Message*, p. 10.

*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol. 8, p. 389.

Herbert W. Armstrong died January 16, 1986, so obviously could not fulfill the prophecy concerning the two witnesses.

Copyright 2016 The Church of God International